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SERMONS

ON THE

EVIDENCE OF A FUTURE STATE

OF

REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS

ARISING FROM A VIEW OF OUR

NATURE AND CONDITION;

PREACHED BEFORE THE

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE,

IN THE YEAR M.DCC.LXXIV.

BY WILLIAM CRAVEN, B.D.

FELLOW OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE,

AND

PROFESSOR OF ARABIC.

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M.DCC.LXXV.

BRITISH MUSEUM

TO THE REVEREND

Dr. OGDEN.

SIR,

I HAVE more reaſons than one for addreſſing you in this manner. In the firſt place, I am willing you ſhould appear at the head of my diſcourſes, in hopes of procuring for them a better reception, by holding

holding you out to the reader, a character with which he is not unacquainted. Beſides, the public is a perſonage to be treated with ceremony and reſpect; on whom it is not fit for every obſcure ſtranger to obtrude himſelf: and I apply to you to introduce me; or at leaſt to give me leave ſo far to uſe your name, as to ſay, that I do not offer myſelf without your knowledge and conſent.

I am alſo deſirous of giving you this teſtimony of my gratitude. I have had the pleaſure and advan-

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tage of a long acquaintance with you: I have found in you a friend; an encourager and promoter of learning, able and ready ever to give me direction and aſſiſtance in the ſtudies I may have made it my buſineſs to follow. In the Arabic language, which I am appointed to teach in the Univerſity of Cambridge, what ſkill I have I owe to you. I ſhould have conformed perhaps more ſtrictly to the intent of the original inſtitution of my office, if, inſtead of attempting to remove ſome objections made to the truths of religion by modern Sceptics,

Sceptics, I had confined myſelf to the Koran, and had laid open the errours and impoſtures of Mahomet. You tell me, if your partiality for me does not deceive you, that my time however has been properly employed, and to as good purpoſe.

I am, Sir, with great reſpect,

Your moſt obliged Servant,

W. CRAVEN.

SERMON I.

GALATIANS vi. 9.

Let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due ſeaſon we ſhall reap, if we faint not.

WE ſhall be reconciled to the hardſhips we ſuffer, if it appear, that they will terminate in our advantage; that the plan of our future welfare and happineſs is carried on under the diſguiſe and cover of preſent evils; and that the imperfections and miſeries of life, which we in our ignorance complain of, render the world a place through which it is proper for us to paſs, before we arrive at a better and more perfect ſtate.

First the world is a ſchool of diſcipline, where we are to make the improvement we want. We have a ſenſe which naturally approves of what is juſt and good: but, if left to itſelf, it is naked and deficient. Though it wiſhes and intends well, the aſſiſtance of a guide is neceſſary to direct it, and to point out the ways by which it may beſt attain its end: and this is the office of reaſon and judgment. And when provided with theſe aids, we ſtill require a further ſupport, in order to be completely furniſhed. We muſt be able after all to practiſe, as well as to diſcern, what is right and fit: and this is a matter that depends on the will. We ſee what aſſociates a moral ſenſe ſtands in need of: we will proceed to inquire how they are to be procured.

As we begin in our early years to diſtinguiſh between right and wrong, and to be inſtructed in the leſſons of morality, our reaſon and judgment will at the ſame time

time gradually improve. A little experience will convince us, that our actions, beſides what we immediately propoſe by them, are apt ſometimes to draw on a train of effects we did not foreſee or ſufficiently conſider. This will put us upon weighing the reſult of our conduct before we engage in it, and on examining, not only thoſe conſequences which are obvious and lie near at hand, but ſuch as are remote; teach us to extend our views, and, inſtead of looking only a little way before us, to allow ourſelves a more ample field of thought and reflection to range in. Thus our minds, which at the firſt are contracted and narrow, will open and become enlarged.

But further; as we advance in life, and our connections with mankind grow more and more numerous, the ſcheme of our duty muſt neceſſarily be rendered more complicated and intricate, as well as wide and comprehenſive; ſo as to in-

volve a competition of intereſts, and engage us often under different and contrary obligations at one and the ſame time. Here ſome dexterity and ſkill will be required to reſolve our difficulties, to decide fairly between oppoſite claims. And thus our mental powers, while they expand and dilate, will be formed alſo to a certain degree of accuracy; and we ſhall acquire an expert correctneſs, as well as compaſs of diſcernment.

Our underſtandings may greatly improve from all that we meet with or obſerve in life: and our ſituation, with reſpect to the diſcipline of the will, is equally favourable. We have to contend with our unruly appetites and deſires: but then, by the conſtitution of our frame, they return not always upon us with the ſame force. As we prevail over them, they grow weaker and weaker, till at laſt they yield of courſe: and it is in this habit that our moral ſecurity conſiſts.

Now we are here ſupplied with opportunities of acquiring that habit. The irregular and uncertain diſtribution of rewards and puniſhments, the evils we ſuffer or dread, create the ſtruggles that are ſo frequent between intereſt and duty; and form thoſe trials by which our wills are to be corrected and fortified. Pain and ſickneſs, diſappointments and adverſity, are of uſe in reſtraining us from a licentious courſe; in taming that pride which is of a growth ſo natural to us; and in ſubduing the haughty and ſtubborn mind to the yoke of patience and moderation. It is thus we are to improve under the calamities and diſorders of life. The imperfections and weakneſs of our condition expoſe us to perpetual difficulties; but it is by a ſeries of ſucceſsful conflicts that virtue is to gain at laſt the aſcendency; that is the ſtated law of her triumph. At the firſt eſtabliſhment of her empire over the heart, ſhe has to encounter an oppoſition the greateſt and ſtrongeſt: by

length of time, her authority comes to be acknowledged and revered as ſacred.

But if this be a true hiſtory of our conſtitution and nature; if the faculties of the will and underſtanding are not created perfect, but may be brought by care and diſcipline to a certain degree of perfection; it appears neceſſary on the ſuppoſition that happineſs is intended and kept in reſerve for us, that we ſhould firſt be placed in a ſituation where we may receive the improvement we are capable of, in order to qualify us for a better and ſuperiour ſtate, in which a proficiency in knowledge and virtue may be requiſite. This life ſeems fitted for the purpoſe of moral improvement: we may fairly ſuppoſe therefore, that we are brought into it with a view to thoſe very ends.

The chief difficulty, in conſidering this world as a place of diſcipline, may be thought

thought to lie here, that in fact it too often proves a very different thing. Many, inſtead of availing themſelves of any opportunities of moral improvement, become on the contrary wicked and depraved from a commerce with mankind. The true purpoſe however ſucceeds in ſome, we may charitably believe, in numberleſs inſtances. But if, unfortunately, we are not at liberty to conſider this world as a place of diſcipline, where all make a due improvement; it remains for us to conceive of it ſomewhat under a different notion, which will ſeem the more juſt becauſe applicable to all, that of a ſtate of probation, where we muſt firſt give ſome proof of ourſelves, before we are diſpoſed of finally hereafter.

If men will not prepare in this life for a better, they muſt expect a worſe. A moral government is ſeen in a proper diſtribution of puniſhments as well as rewards: and as puniſhment cannot be

inflicted, where guilt has not been incurred; ſo rewards ſuppoſe a previous merit. We are willing to allow, that a ſtate of exquiſite miſery ſhould only take place, if at all, after a ſtate of wickedneſs, ſuch too as has been obſtinate and atrocious: but ought not alſo a ſtate of complete happineſs to be preceded by one, where we have given proof of our good deſerts, at leaſt in ſome ſmall degree? May not as much be ſaid for the order of theſe ſtates in the one way as in the other? Is not a propriety of arrangement alike diſcernible in both caſes? We indeed, who begin our exiſtence only here, who can neither plead our merits nor yet be accuſed of guilt in any former ſtate, are undeſerving, at the time we enter this life, either of reward or puniſhment. We are to be placed, as it ſhould ſeem, in a world, where there is a mixture of good and evil; where happineſs and miſery reign not abſolutely or ſingly, but divide the empire between them. We actually

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are placed in such a world: and we must look on ourselves rather as put to the trial, than as rewarded or punished.

It cannot be thought unreasonable, to make pure happiness the result of choice and desert; to bestow the full reward of virtue on such only as have testified a love and regard for it. But that regard would not have been so apparent, the merit of chooſing good and shunning evil could not have been so great, had virtue and happiness, vice and misery, been from the first inseparable, been now made to go every where respectively hand in hand together, or had men been created much more perfect in their natures; and so had been determined to a right choice, both by the bent of inclination, and by a near as well as sure prospect of rewards and punishments. It appears, as if an imperfect state were at least not an improper forerunner of one more perfect,

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Thus much ſeems agreeable to reaſon: we will inquire into the matter of fact. We are in an imperfect ſtate, where at the ſame time that we are liable to do what is wrong as well as right, a good behaviour is not conſtantly rewarded, or a bad puniſhed. However this life, we may believe, leads to another that is more perfect. We have opportunities of enlarging our faculties, of acquiring improved habits, ſo as to render ourſelves fit for what we were at firſt unqualified: we are in a ſituation, in which we give full proof of what we deſerve. We ſeem then to be preparing for a ſtate, which will be thought of a ſuperiour order to the preſent, whether we conſider it as one, where certain qualifications are required to make us proper for it, or where rewards and puniſhments will be diſtributed regularly according to our deſerts.

Whatever reaſon we may think we ſee for a gratuitous communication of perfection

fection and happineſs, it does not take place in reality. We ſeldom can become poſſeſſed of any advantages or attainments, unleſs we are acceſſories. The various endowments and graces of the mind, both intellectual and moral, are in a certain meaſure the fruits of care and application. And how is it with regard to the ſupport and health of the body? The neceſſaries and conveniencies of life are not preſented ready for uſe, as the ſpontaneous gifts of nature: we are only ſupplied with materials; it is left as a taſk for us to prepare and adorn them. Our ſituation is ſuch as is every way to be improved by ourſelves. To ſubſiſt with comfort, requires ſome attention in men of every rank; and on the contrary by caſting all prudence and diſcretion aſide, they may render themſelves almoſt in any degree miſerable. Thus as far as we ſee of the œconomy of the divine government, ſome diligence and care on our part is made a condition. And we gene-

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rally experience ſuch effects from our good endeavours, as afford an encouragement to perſevere. We muſt continue to grow and increaſe in virtue, if we hope at laſt for perfect happineſs.

We find at preſent, our ſatisfaction is made to take its riſe partly from our inward ſentiments; that our enjoyment in any ſtation, to which we happen to be advanced, depends in ſome meaſure on the turn and temper of mind we bring along with us. It ſeems neceſſary then, according to the courſe God is pleaſed to appoint, that we firſt prepare ourſelves for a happier life, by cultivating and improving a proper diſpoſition.

However bad a ſtate this world may ſeem, yet if we conſider what we are when we enter it, we hardly ſhall think we were fit and qualified for a better. We live not under a government, where rewards and puniſhments are accurately

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diſtributed; we muſt firſt grow to a proper maturity and become ripe for it, by ſhewing which of the two we deſerve. Yet now juſtice is known to viſit us occaſionally, while we are only making out, as it were, our ſeveral claims upon her: when their nature and degree is ſufficiently determined and ſettled, we may expect ſhe will appear and decide among us in full majeſty and form. Virtue is here made in general both a condition and ingredient of happineſs, even where we are to be trained up to it; and where it is neceſſary for this purpoſe, that difficulties and obſtructions ſhould lie in its way, and that it ſhould fail of meeting with its reward, and of producing always it's due effect; what fruit then muſt it yield hereafter, when there will not be the like reaſon to oppoſe and check it, and when it ſhall be tranſplanted, as we may ſuppoſe, out of a harſher into a more friendly climate?

It

It is by ſuch reflections, that the humble and well diſpoſed reconcile themſelves to the things of this life, and are even thankful for them. But we on the contrary are apt to murmur and repine, becauſe our ſituation is not ſo eaſy and agreeable as we wiſh. How premature and prepoſterous are we in our deſires! We want to be completely happy, before we have done any thing to deſerve it. *In due ſeaſon we ſhall reap, if we faint not.* Thus we ſuffer our folly and our pride to outſtrip the ſuggeſtions of modeſt reaſon. As often as we behold either virtue degraded or vice triumphant, we call out in our impatience and indignation on the Judge of the world to execute juſtice among us: though at the ſame time it is to be apprehended, his interpoſition would not as yet be proper, and that things are only preparing for his coming.

Thus the ſeeming irregularities and defects of our preſent ſtate do not neceſ-

ſarily imply an imperfection and errour in the divine adminiſtration; they admit of another, and that not an improbable ſolution. They are ſuch, we muſt allow, as are reconcileable to the moſt perfect adminiſtration by infinite wiſdom, when we, with our ignorance, conceive ourſelves in ſome meaſure equal to the taſk. Even we have a faint perception, how this life conſtitutes a part, and that the firſt, in a ſcheme of moral government, which having ſuch a creature as man for a ſubject conſiſts of various parts, ſome preparatory to and proper to introduce others that follow.

It may be aſked out of a wanton ſpirit of objecting, whether it would not have been better, that this ſcheme had been abridged, by our being made completely perfect and happy all at once? We can come to no determination in this matter by means of our reaſoning, any further than by preſuming it would not have

have been better, ſince God has decreed otherwiſe. Were indeed our underſtandings and experience much enlarged beyond their preſent bounds, we might be more able perhaps to judge, how far the ſyſtem of the univerſe is capable of improvement; and whether it is proper for man to hold any where a place in the creation. We muſt now content ourſelves, if our nature and ſituation, taken as we find them, appear ſuch as may be reduced to a plan of moral government actually ſubſiſting.

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SERMON II.

HEBR. ix. 27.

It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.

THE preſent and a future life muſt be thought to have a mutual dependence and reſpect, and we ſhall conceive of the one according to the light in which we view the other. If we look upon this world as a ſchool of diſcipline; the next will be regarded as a ſuperiour ſtate, where certain endowments are required as neceſſary qualifications: or if we conſider this world as a place of probation; the other will ſtand related to it as a place of rewards and puniſhments. We have ſeen how far theſe ſuppoſitions

are credible from our ſituation and circumſtances. It remains for us, to examine what further evidence is to be collected from the teſtimony of our ſenſes and internal feelings; and to inquire how far it is probable, from our particular nature and conſtitution, that this life is to be ſucceeded by another where rewards and puniſhments will be accurately diſtributed.

We are able to diſtinguiſh between right and wrong, good and evil; ſo that all actions appear not alike to us, ſeem not equal and indifferent: we approve of ſome and condemn others. And what is it we are to infer from this moral diſcernment with which we are indued?

But before we make the inference, it may be proper to obviate what ſome might think of throwing in the way as difficulties. We find there are men, from an extreme wickedneſs or ignorance, who com-

commit ſin without remorſe; without any apprehenſion and dread of puniſhment, or even ſenſe of ſhame. Here then, we ſhall be told, there are no traces of conſcience diſcernible at all. But allowing there is ſuch a thing as conſcience in the world, it may be ſaid to operate in a precarious, uncertain manner; ſince men are to be found, in ſome ages and countries, who follow thoſe actions as virtues, which others ſhun as vices. Or allowing laſtly, that our ſenſe of right and wrong is in a certain meaſure regular and uniform in it's ſuggeſtions, yet this, ſome perhaps would perſuade us, is to be accounted for from education and habit; who may argue, it is no wonder that diſcipline ſhould bring us to an agreement in our ſentiments, and be attended with effects alike and ſimilar, when it has ever been applied by political men to ſerve one and the ſame end, the intereſts of government: and thus ſome may be for eluding the concluſion we are willing

to draw, by repreſenting our knowledge of good and evil, as a creature of policy, and not as derived from any original impreſſions in our frame, which might lead to a diſcovery of the purpoſe of our Maker.

It is to be granted, that our ſenſe of right and wrong cannot ſhew itſelf to advantage, when deprived of the aſſiſtance of a good education; that under the influence of a bad and corrupt one it may exert itſelf erroneouſly; and that poſſibly in ſome caſes it may not even exert itſelf at all, as where men, through inveterate habits or an exceſſive ignorance, are quite loſt to any feeling. Yet while we allow this of our moral, the like, we muſt remember, holds alſo true of our intellectual faculties, which it is confeſſed are of divine original.

For they are ſuch as receive improvement from education: and yet we find

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that men, even after their underſtandings are cultivated and improved, are wont to think differently and entertain oppoſite opinions on the ſame ſubject. Our reaſon is liable to the imputation of contrariety. It is various in its appearances; there it is ſeen to ſhine in it's pureſt luſtre, while here we only diſcover ſome faint glimmerings: and yet thoſe, who eclipſe others by their greater light of underſtanding, have not always a like ſuperiority of diſcernment in matters of common behaviour and duty. There ſeems to be at leaſt as great a diſproportion and diſagreement in men's reaſon, which we allow to be the gift of God, and given us too for our direction, as there is in their ſenſe of right and wrong. Our rational and moral endowments ſtand on a like footing, and have equal pretenſions to be deemed native and inartificial.

In both caſes we derive ſome helps from inſtruction: and this ſhews that we

are prepared by nature to profit from it; otherwiſe it could not be applied with any effect. Our notions then of right and wrong cannot be called entirely a matter of human invention, in which the Author of our being has no concern: if he does not actually implant them, he at leaſt furniſhes the ſtock on which they are ingrafted; if the notions themſelves are acquired, the capacity to learn them we muſt allow to be natural; which is enough for our purpoſe, and affords a foundation ſufficient for the concluſion we want to eſtabliſh.

What we collect from this view of ourſelves is, that God has not thought fit to beſtow on us a nature, either abſolutely perfect, or ſuch as can be brought to it's ſtated pitch of perfection without culture. However our faculties, confined as they are to limits and conditions, diſtinguiſh us from the reſt of the animal creation; ſo much indeed, as plainly to point out the

the intention of our Maker. It is impoſſible for a brute, by all the powers of education or efforts of policy, to be taught, in the manner we are, the exerciſe of reaſon, and to acquire a ſenſe of diſcriminating between ſeveral actions. And is it in vain that we are formed differently from other creatures, which are blind, and cannot attain to the moral diſcernment we poſſeſs? Has not the wiſe contriver of nature an end in all his appointments? He means no doubt to judge us by the law, which he has made us in ſo eminent a degree capable of perceiving.

Now indeed the good ſometimes have to ſtruggle with diſappointments and afflictions, while the wicked proſper and flouriſh. This world preſents us with a ſcene that is irregular. Yet in moſt caſes, whatever their real condition may be, men are uſually told, by ſomething that ſpeaks from within, how they deſerve at leaſt to be treated. We have a conſciouſ-

neſs either of good or ill deſert. Thus God, whom ſome chooſe to make a ſingular being, of whom nothing can be known, has not left himſelf without a witneſs, while our thoughts accuſe or elſe excuſe us. He has planted in our breaſts a monitor, a repreſentative of himſelf, not only to direct us in our behaviour, but to forewarn us of what we have to expect. We know from experience what the preſent ſtate is; and let thoſe hopes and fears, which operate with men almoſt univerſally, and at times ſo forcibly, according as their minds are poſſeſſed with a conſcious ſenſe of guilt or virtue, declare to us the general tenour of the ſtate which is to follow.

Theſe hopes and fears concerning a life to come, are peculiar to ourſelves; are ſuch as other animals are void of, ſuch indeed as it is not poſſible to infuſe into them by any art or ſtudy. They cannot be taught to look forward to ſo great a diſt-

diſtance: they are incapable of conſidering and of being affected with the moral quality of actions. We caſt our eyes towards the next world, which we behold with a ſecret uneaſineſs or complacency, according as we ſtand acquitted or convicted of guilt to our own hearts. Other creatures are blind to the view of an hereafter, are callous and dead to thoſe forebodings, which that proſpect naturally awakens in a conſcious mind. This creates ſo eſſential a difference between a man and a brute, as to point out the end allotted to each, and the deſtination of their ſeveral natures. For us, who have a ſenſe of duty, a perception of the law and obligation of virtue; who poſſeſs the feelings of good and bad deſert; a ſtate of rewards and puniſhments, in which we already take an intereſt, is, we may believe, really intended: but this can hardly be ſuppoſed of thoſe creatures, which are not touched with a ſenſe of duty; which have not our preſages of thought; and are not, like us, apprehenſive of deſerving well or ill.

We

We are diſtinguiſhed by capacities and powers of our own. God has given us certain talents, which exalt us above his other works, which ennoble us; and he will be ſure to examine how far we have availed ourſelves of them, and whether we have applied them to a proper uſe. Let brutes, that have no underſtanding, periſh; for man it is appointed to riſe from death unto life, and to render an account of his deeds.

It is true there are ſome, through a natural defect or poſſibly other accidental cauſes, who labour all their lives unavoidably under ignorance: others again are cut off early, before they come to know good and evil. Touching thoſe inſtances, and ſo far as any help is to be borrowed from the preſent argument, we may ſeem deſtitute of a proof of a future ſtate, either of rewards or puniſhments; and might be at a loſs perhaps what to decide. With regard to the reſt of mankind; they

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are in ſuch a ſituation, that they come to the uſe of their reaſon, and learn to diſtinguiſh in ſome meaſure between right and wrong, almoſt of courſe. But beſides; while we thus arrive at the knowledge of a moral law, whether we are much ſollicitous to underſtand it or not, we are under a neceſſity of ſhewing how far we are willing to conform to it: for it is impoſſible in this caſe to preſerve ourſelves in a ſtate of abſolute indifference. We become then, independently of our own choice, reſponſible for our conduct: and ought we not to believe, ſince God ſo far makes us accountable beings, that he intends to deal with us as ſuch, and that we muſt be brought at ſome time or other before him in judgment?

At firſt our reaſon and ſenſe of right and wrong are not diſcernible. As we advance forward in life, and come to enter upon the ſcene of buſineſs, when our other affections and paſſions are going

going to be called forth, they alſo begin to diſcover themſelves. And thus they appear at a proper time; offer themſelves ſeaſonably as guides: and they are not mere guides of human device, but ſpeak to us with a divine authority. God however interferes no otherwiſe, than by conveying to us through our faculties an intimation of his pleaſure. It would be too awful a check upon the will, were his Juſtice always to preſent herſelf before us, ready armed to take vengeance, when we are about to commit a guilty action. She retires to ſome diſtance, leaving us for a while to our own diſcretion. Thus we are preparing for a ſtate of rewards and puniſhments. At the firſt we were unfit for it; being incapable of thought and reflection, and void of all merit and demerit. By degrees, we both learn in ſome meaſure to comprehend the law of juſtice, and at the ſame time grow liable to it: and as we become at laſt in every reſpect proper ſubjects for a government in which every

man

man ſhall *receive his own reward*, it is to be expected that hereafter we muſt be placed under ſuch an one; where we ſhall not only, by means of our underſtanding, be qualified in ſome ſort to be witneſſes of God's righteous judgments, but alſo, from our paſt behaviour for which we are anſwerable, be made to have an intereſt in his deciſions.

We are to infer the purpoſe of our Maker, from a certain congruity and fitneſs diſcoverable in us; a fitneſs, we were not at firſt poſſeſſed of, we only acquire it here: and therefore we are not brought now into a ſtate of rewards and puniſhments, God muſt be underſtood to have it in reſerve for us. He ſpeaks to us by the voice of our conſcience; forewarns us of a judgment to come, by imprinting in our minds a ſenſe of good or ill deſert: he makes a revelation of his decree in the law of our conſtitution and frame, which does not merely point out to us an hereafter, but ſuggeſts the form of our future condition.

Thus

Thus we may learn the deſtiny which awaits us, by conſulting the genius of our nature. It ſcarce can be called impoſſible for us, to judge beforehand whether it be the will of the Deity or not, to call us to an account, and to place us under a government where juſtice is to be duly executed, from a pretence that the intentions of ſo ſingular a being lie remote from knowledge. He himſelf informs us of his intentions, by the impreſſions he has ſtamped on our minds. If the deſigns of God are ſuch as we can no where come within the reach of by our ways of thinking and reaſoning, it will follow, that the end which he propoſes in any of his works is not to be diſcovered at all from what we may conceive them to be fitted for; and that it is in vain for us to have recourſe to the argument of final cauſes in any caſe whatever. Yet ſurely that argument is to be admitted in ſome inſtances: it offers itſelf on this occaſion, and ſeems to bring along with it an evidence not inconſiderable.

SERMON III.

ECCLES. ix. 2, 3.

All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that ſacrificeth, and to him that ſacrificeth not: as is the good, ſo is the ſinner; and he that ſweareth, as he that feareth an oath.

This is an evil among all things that are done under the ſun, that there is one event unto all.

PART I.

THE reſult of the inquiry we have hitherto been making into our nature and condition is, that we may reaſonably

ſonably indulge the expectation of ſucceeding hereafter to a happier life, provided we fail not through our miſconduct, and are not the authors of our own diſappointment. But we will proceed to take ſome further account of our ſituation, and to examine certain parts of it more minutely: in order, if poſſible, by a more accurate ſurvey of this ſtate, to open to us a clearer proſpect into the next. And firſt the general laws, by which we are governed, offer themſelves to our notice. They may indeed have been in ſome meaſure included in what has already gone before; but they require to be conſidered more diſtinctly and fully.

They have long been complained of as the principal cauſe of the irregularity and diſorders of life. Through them is this *evil among all things that are done under the ſun, that there is one event unto all.* But how is the grievance to be removed? Is it fit the laws of gravity, or rather of nature at large,

large, ſhould be ſuſpended or varied, as often as it ſuits the convenience of particular men? Shall God cauſe the ſun to ſhine on the righteous alone? Are their fields only to be moiſtened with the drops of rain, and bleſſed with an increaſe? Muſt froſt and ſtorms of hail and wind, either not approach their vineyard, or in ſuch a manner as to do no injury; and exert all their fury and malice in blaſting the labours of the wicked? By this rule different men, who live in the ſame neighbourhood, and even family, are to be governed each by laws of their own, according to the quality and degree of their moral character: and we ſhould behold in one and the ſame place a climate, a ſcene of things, a courſe of nature, at total variance with itſelf. It is impoſſible for us to conceive the diſorder and confuſion, which would be occaſioned by this way of rectifying, what is called, the bad and irregular appearances in the government of the world.

Our Saviour has taught us, in one of his parables, that this life is not the ſeaſon for making a due diſtinction between the godly and the wicked. The tares, he ſays, muſt not be gathered as yet, leſt the wheat be rooted up with them. *Let both grow until the harveſt; and in the time of harveſt I will ſay to the reapers, gather ye together firſt the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.* He gives this as a familiar illuſtration of the harm and miſchief of inflicting on the guilty the puniſhment they deſerve. No evil can be brought upon them which will not extend further, and equally affect thoſe who are connected with them, their friends, their family, and children. The tares muſt be ſuffered to ſpring up with the wheat; it is fit, that good men and bad be allowed for the preſent to partake alike of the common benefits of life.

Men of piety and religion, obſerving how *all things come alike to all*, will find ſupport

ſupport and comfort in the Word of God, where it is declared, that *he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteouſneſs*; and then the diſorders and irregularities, ſo apt to alarm and perplex us, will be ſet to right and corrected. But ſhall we alſo have recourſe to our reaſon as well as Scripture, and conſider whether any notions, we are able to form of propriety and convenience, can be of ſome help in bringing us to acquieſce under the preſent condition of the world?

It ſeems fit no doubt, that the bad ſhould be puniſhed for their tranſgreſſion, and the good rewarded for their obedience: but does it appear abſolutely neceſſary, that this ſhould be done now immediately? On the contrary we are taught to perceive, that the execution of juſtice may be deferred more commodiouſly to another ſeaſon. Let things then continue for their allotted time in the preſent ſtate. Let general laws have their

courſe: they are not under the direction of a blind chance, but a ſupreme deſign.

The beauty and harmony, we ſee and ſo much admire in the univerſe, is owing every where to the uniform operation and influence of it's laws. Hence ariſes the conſtant viciſſitude of day and night; the regular return of the ſeveral ſeaſons of the year; the order in the motions of the heavenly bodies, which have continued ſo long to perform their revolutions, each in the ſame period of time, and all according to a certain rule. The laws of matter, which reach ſo far and unite ſuch diſtant parts into one ſyſtem; the laws common to all animals, however different in their make and nature; theſe create an appearance of method and œconomy, and ſhew that things are digeſted into one great plan of government.

In the common courſe of nature, where we are ſo much concerned, we find that events

events follow one another in order; that like effects are always to be produced in like ways. By this means the rules, which once have been diſcovered, ſtill continue to be of uſe, and ſerve to direct us in the ſeveral occaſions of life. Were it not a matter made familiar by conſtant experience, it would ſeem wonderful that a grain of corn, when caſt into the ground, ſhould multiply and yield ſo large an increaſe, as to become ſixty or an hundred fold. But having found this to happen in a few inſtances, we have recourſe ever after to the ſame expedient, not doubting of it's ſucceſs, notwithſtanding that the means we uſe are ſo very diſproportionate to the end.

We are intereſted in the nature and qualities of things; this renders us diligent and attentive in learning them: but it is the regularity with which bodies operate on us and on one another, that ſtamps on every obſervation we are able

to make a laſting value. It is thus that we are taught the uſe of certain ſorts of diet, and to expect nouriſhment from them. Not that we can diſcern diſtinctly how food affects our bodies, and cauſes them to grow; trace minutely the ways, by which it adminiſters health and vigour. This is one of the wonders of nature, where the fact is clear, and ſuch as we can always depend upon: but the manner in which it is performed is dark and myſterious. It is by a like magic, that we are delighted with the reliſh of certain fruits, the fragrance of certain flowers. We are kept alive and ſupported, receive pleaſure and pain, by an appointment wholly latent and inexplicable. In theſe and the like inſtances, all that we perceive and underſtand of the connection between the cauſe and it's effect, is merely the conſtancy of the connection. We are liable, from accidents and the condition of mortality, to various infirmities and diſorders, which are to be removed or alleviated by the help

help of medicines: but we cannot explain how they perform their cures; we only know that they have been found to be of uſe, and that on like occaſions they may be applied with like ſucceſs.

Thus things go on and work in one conſtant manner and track: and to this we owe the diſcovery of the arts of life, and the comfort of our ſubſiſtence. Was the conſtitution of the world fluctuating and variable, we could have no ſecurity that an experiment, which we have been ſo fortunate as to make in one inſtance, would ſucceed and be attended with a like effect in any future trial: and we ſhould live in a ſtate of perpetual anxiety and diſtraction; be for ever engaged in a wearyſome purſuit of knowledge, which if obtained, we ſhould have the mortification to think, muſt ſoon again become uſeleſs. But as nature is at unity with herſelf, a diſcovery once made, is made for ever. As ſhe has all along maintained

a ſameneſs of character, men have been able, in a courſe of time, to advance to a conſiderable degree of intimacy with it.

Chance, curioſity and deſign, operating through a ſucceſſion of ſo many ages, and we ought perhaps to add, a revelation made in ſome of the earlieſt and rudeſt, have all contributed to introduce the ſeveral arts of life. But that which makes them a treaſure ſo much worth the keeping, is our living under general laws, ſuch as act in every place and time uniformly and in a like manner. And this conſtancy with which nature adheres to her rules, is what all underſtand, the ignorant as well as the learned. The Plowman relies on certain effects of her power with as much confidence as the Philoſopher. He purſues his daily taſk with cheerfulneſs: and while he expects to reap, after a ſtated interval, the cuſtomary fruits of his labour, he ſhews the ſenſe he entertains of the regularity ſubſiſting in the government

ment of the world. So does the Mariner, who ſteers his way by the ſtars in the unſtable element of the ſea. He preſumes at leaſt on their keeping themſelves fixed in one certain, unalterable order; and he truſts to them as to a ſignal hung out in the heavens to direct him in his courſe.

General laws then have both their beauty and uſe in the natural world: and that we may be reconciled to them the more, it remains for us to conſider, whether the ſame is not alſo true of the moral world.

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SERMON III.

ECCLES. ix. 2, 3.

All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that ſacrificeth, and to him that ſacrificeth not: as is the good, ſo is the ſinner; and he that ſweareth, as he that feareth an oath.

This is an evil among all things that are done under the ſun, that there is one event unto all.

PART II.

WE come now to examine the moral uſe and beauty of general laws. Were they to ceaſe, and particular laws to take place inſtead of them, which

ſhould

ſhould be adjuſted exactly to every man's private character, be regulated in ſuch a manner by our views and motives, that we ſhould conſtantly meet with ſucceſs or diſappointment, with reward or puniſhment, according as our deſigns were honeſt or diſhoneſt, and our deeds good or evil; this would ſoon go near to deprive us of our freedom, and to rob us of the power of making a choice, by determining for us the meaſures we are to purſue. So cloſe a connection between intereſt and duty would leave in our conduct no room for merit, would reduce men to one courſe of action, and take from amongſt them all diſtinction. It might poſſibly afford, at the firſt view, a more regular and pleaſing proſpect, were virtue and happineſs, vice and miſery, ſeen to be companions walking on every occaſion reſpectively hand in hand together: but it is neceſſary that they be kept in ſome degree aſunder. We can partly underſtand, that the acts of a perfect

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diſtributive juſtice, if executed in all inſtances immediately and in full rigour, would defeat themſelves, and put an end to the being of a moral government at it's birth; and that they are to be ſuſpended for a while, in order to give liberty to men's diſpoſitions to work, and to allow time for their ſeveral deſerts to appear and arrive at ſome growth.

According to the preſent ſcheme and condition of things, where *there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked*, where a good behaviour is not always ſure of being remarkably diſtinguiſhed by it's reward, men come to diſcover themſelves; are made to ſhew what they really are, and whether they have a ſincere, diſintereſted regard for virtue. General laws make the preſent world a ſtate of probation, the ſtate which God has appointed for us as the firſt in order; and are neceſſary to carry on ſo far the plan of his moral government.

They

They are then of this uſe: and they will be thought alſo to have a juſtneſs and beauty, if we conſider them as adapted to us in the particular condition in which we enter the world. For that is the ſame in all. Men are not born righteous or wicked; they bring not hither their virtues and vices along with them: but as they advance in life, they acquire, in various degrees, thoſe habits of virtue and vice, which mark and diſtinguiſh characters. At firſt no one can lay claim, through a greater merit, to any ſuperiority or diſtinction above others; we are ſo far upon terms of equality: and we ſeem therefore to require the ſame treatment. Now general laws do us this juſtice: they go on in a ſteady, impartial courſe, without any intended preferences, rendering, as much as lies in their power, to every one what is alike and equal.

The chief deſign we are to believe is, that men give ſome proof of themſelves in

in the preſent life: and general laws are neceſſary for ſuch a purpoſe. They have a fitneſs, conſidered as means leading to an end: but they alſo appear right, when viewed ſimply in themſelves, without a reference to a certain deſign; any further than as they may be ſuppoſed to have a reſpect to men in their original ſtate, and to be regulated by it.

There is a time, a certain point of view, in which we appear all to be on a level, and to reſemble perfectly one another; this gives general laws a propriety. But through their means we are brought to vary, to diſcover our ſeveral inclinations and diſpoſitions; this ſhews their utility. And we may further obſerve, they effect their purpoſe without uſing violence; without diſcouraging too much the cauſe of virtue. For while they produce a difference of character, they at the ſame time allow that a proviſion be made for it, ſo far as is conſiſtent with their main

main intention. We muſt own, there is at preſent ſome diſtinction made between the righteous and the wicked. The former have for the moſt part the advantage; enjoy upon the whole more real ſatisfaction and comfort. There is a preference ſhewn them; yet in ſuch a way and degree, as ſtill to leave men in a ſtate of probation. Were it true, that all meet with exactly the ſame reception from the world, there would be the leſs reaſon to complain, as all come to it at firſt with a like recommendation: but in fact, through an exuberance of divine wiſdom, juſtice in this reſpect is more than ſatisfied. Thus we find, in the œconomy of thoſe general laws by which we are governed, a ſingular contrivance, a conſummate beauty and perfection.

It appears to be no more than what is fit and requiſite, if we conſider men only in one certain poſition, that they ſhould be treated all alike. And this, as we have

ſeen,

ſeen, is done, ſo far as general laws are concerned. We will in the next place take a ſurvey of the inſtitutions of ſociety. Here, we ſhall find, there is not the like reſpect paid to men's original equality. They are placed in different ſituations: ſome in poſts of wealth and authority, others in a ſtate of indigence and ſubjection; ſome indulge themſelves in eaſe, others are condemned to labour. Government impoſes unequal conditions: ſhe ſhews indeed her impartiality, as often as ſhe grants a like protection to all. Neither is there that diſproportion in the ſatisfaction men enjoy, which we might poſſibly be led to imagine from the great diſparity in their outward circumſtances. *A man's life conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth.* One in a low ſtation may become reconciled to the hardſhips of it, and live as eaſy and contented, as he who is much ſuperiour in rank; merely through a difference in education, and the force of habit and cuſtom. Thus

while men are proud to introduce diſtinctions into life, nature on her part is aſſiduous in preſerving happineſs upon a level. Not that ſhe can every where effect this: numbers are ſtill left in a condition, which makes them deſervedly the objects of pity. We muſt not expect to find an equal diſtribution of juſtice, that men will there be dealt with alike, where the good of individuals is not the thing ſo much ſought after and conſulted, as that of the public. We ſhall conceive more truly of the end of ſociety, if we conſider it as anſwering the intention of our Maker, by promoting the general welfare of his creatures; and withal as ſerving this further purpoſe, of proving more effectually men's diſpoſition and behaviour, by means of the intercourſe they have one with another, and under this inequality too of condition.

We ſhall not perhaps be ſo apt to complain, that *all things come alike to all*, as that we

we find it too ſeldom to be the caſe; for ſuch a diſpoſition of events, when viewed in a certain light, appears regular and equitable. And thus we might be tempted almoſt to object to the eſtabliſhment of ſo many different orders and ranks in government, as encroaching too much on man's equality, and violating the grand and primary law of nature. Only we ſhall do well to conſider ſeriouſly with ourſelves, whether greater advantages are not to be procured by almoſt every individual in a ſtate of ſociety, than he could poſſibly hope for, if he lived out of it; whether the beſt proviſion and ſecurity of private good and happineſs is not there to be met with, though not in an equal degree by all; and whether in ſhort juſtice may not there be thought to yield and give way a little, in order that benevolence may have room to exert herſelf more effectually and to better purpoſe.

SERMON IV.

2 PETER iii. 12.

Looking for and haſting unto the coming of the day of God.

THE conſideration of our nature and condition, according to ſome, can never lead us to expect hereafter a ſtate any ways different from or ſuperiour to the preſent; and we who look for a further reward and puniſhment of the righteous and the wicked, for a full and perfect diſtribution of juſtice, in the world to come, are ſaid to entertain a fond and groundleſs belief. "The experienced train of events, we are told, is the great ſtandard by which we are to regulate our expectations: nothing elſe can

be appealed to in the field or in the ſenate; nothing elſe ought ever to be heard of in the ſchool or in the cloſet. It is repreſented as a matter of mere ſpeculation and curioſity to inquire, what it is the diſpoſition of things proceeds from, whether an intelligence and deſign, or not; for whatever it proceeds from, the diſpoſition itſelf, on which depends our happineſs or miſery, and conſequently our conduct and deportment in life, is ſtill the ſame. No event can be foreſeen or foretold, no reward or puniſhment expected or dreaded, beyond what is already known by practice and obſervation." According to this, no change can be apprehended ever to take place in the regulation of our rewards and puniſhments; ſo that a future life is to be eſteemed, if any thing, rather as a continuation of the preſent, than as ſomething different; which ſets the ſuppoſition entirely aſide of a ſucceſſion of ſtates of various orders.

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The diſpoſition of things will by no means furniſh every where like rules of conduct and behaviour, ſo long as it is not underſtood alike, and ſeen in one and the ſame light. Men will found on their experience a ſyſtem of ethics, according as they conſider and apply their experience. Preſent experience, of which we are told ſo often and ſo much, that boaſted giant, whoſe praiſes and virtues ſome extol in ſo high a ſtrain, and recite with ſuch complacency, will to others ſeem a thing low and contemptible.

Our acquaintance with life, however long it may be called, ſupplies us with no great variety of knowledge. All that has hitherto come to paſs, is no more than the ſame matter repeated over and over; *and there is no new thing under the ſun.* A race of men are brought upon the ſtage, where they act a part for a few years, and then make room for another generation. This is the whole of what we

have ſeen of our hiſtory. When it is ſaid the world is old, of which we muſt be ſuppoſed to have much experience, this is to be underſtood merely of the time it has remained in it's preſent ſtate, and not of any progreſs as yet made in it's ſcheme of government. We have had no actual knowledge of the divine adminiſtration, any further than in this one period of our exiſtence: but we have ſtill to continue under it to eternity. All then that has hitherto appeared, muſt be deemed an inconſiderable part of ſomething that is to follow; the beginning of what is to receive it's completion hereafter. Indeed the little we have ſeen of God's government over us, ſcarce deſerves to be dignified by the name of experience, and can afford but a poor and ſcanty information of all that remains to be brought to light. However if we will make our experience, ſuch as it is, the ſtandard by which we are to regulate our conduct, it is neceſſary, in order to form from it ſuch rules as

may

may ſafely be relied upon, that we apply it properly, and make ſome allowance for a change of circumſtances; which will lead us to obſerve another defect in preſent experience, as it ſeems to be applied by ſome.

It is not to be imagined that the way, in which we find things adminiſtered at preſent, affords a juſt and exact ſpecimen of God's future government: the treatment proper for us in one ſituation, may not be ſo in another. When we came into the world, our minds were naked and unfurniſhed, clear of all impreſſions: by degrees we contract habits, either good or bad; ſuch too as depend on our own choice. We are only training to a certain character; and it remains to be ſeen how God will deal with us, after we are arrived at ſome growth, conſidered as moral agents.

We appear very different beings at the

times of our entrance into life and departure out of it. A change is made in every man's condition, if viewed by itſelf; and the like is true, if compared with that of others. We all were originally upon an equality; not diſtinguiſhable by any merit or demerit. Men ſet off at firſt from the ſame term; they afterwards take to ſeveral courſes. And ſhould God interpoſe, immediately on their beginning to ſeparate, by puniſhing or rewarding them to the full for every good or bad action, this would be the means indeed of reducing them again to a ſameneſs of character; but it would be by a kind of force. At preſent, an alteration is produced both in man's abſolute and relative ſtate: and is it not ſuch as may occaſion new meaſures, give riſe to a different form of adminiſtration, when God comes to diſpoſe of us hereafter?

We ſhould be unwilling to believe that any Legiſlator, ſuch as a Lycurgus or a Solon,

Solon, who had provided a certain people with a body of laws for their government, would think of adapting to them the very same laws without variation, if by some means or other an entire revolution had been brought about in their manners and situation. Whence comes it then, that we are to expect no reward or punishment, beyond what is already known by practice and observation; and are to suppose, if we exist hereafter at all, that we shall continue under much the same dispensation as at present, notwithstanding the change that may here have been wrought in us? Was the world indeed a machine, where all that happens is the effect of mere matter and motion, without a superiour principle to guide and direct it, we could better conceive perhaps how things might for ever go on in the same track: and it would be fit for us to regulate our behaviour by present experience, strictly so called. But the one is not so credible, nor the other so prudent,

on the ſuppoſition that an overruling intelligence diſpoſes of events: for then it may reaſonably be apprehended, as ſoon as this life comes to an end, that another order and diſpoſition of things will take place; that a new ſtate is to commence: and it may behoove us to regulate our behaviour by ſuch an expectation, and not altogether by preſent experience.

God no doubt will every where adjuſt his meaſures to our condition. This may lawfully be preſumed. We find that all animals are diſpoſed of, according to their ſeveral natures, each in their proper element. And will not the wiſdom, that appears in the arrangement of the irrational part of the creation, be diſplayed alſo in the government of the intellectual world? Should it be objected, that in fact the like order and œconomy is not viſible in both; that virtue and vice are, as it were, creatures of an oppoſite nature, and yet we find them placed in the ſame element

element together, where *there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked*; we may obſerve in anſwer, that a difference of character, the diſtinction of righteous and wicked, does not ſubſiſt among men when firſt they are brought into the world, but is introduced afterward. Their merits originally ſtood upon a level, which will help to explain the treatment they meet with; and ſhew in ſome ſort whence it is, that they have the ſame habitation allotted them, where *all things come alike to all*. We think indeed we even can diſcover a propriety in ſuch an appointment. And when we conſider alſo this world as a ſtate of probation, the true light in which it is to be viewed, we are convinced ſtill more of the expediency of a promiſcuous diſtribution of good and evil: but we are not to imagine that thoſe diſorders, as they are called, which may be fit and juſt in our preſent circumſtances, will be permitted when the reaſons of them no longer remain. Nay if we muſt argue in

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this case on principles of experience, we may say it is to be expected hereafter, agreeably to the pattern and form of government of this life, that those only are to be placed in the same state, and under a like regimen of laws, in whom there is found, at their admission into that state, an equality, or at least some similitude of character.

In the house of God are many mansions, inhabited, it may be, by different orders of intellectual beings, among whom various laws reign, various dispensations subsist, as their several capacities or conditions require. There are however, within the sphere of our knowledge, creatures without number, each under regulations peculiar to their own kind. But if different creatures are treated differently, the like is to be supposed of the same beings, in different periods of their existence. At present we are only in the first stage, in the very infancy of our's. Rude, as we

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are, and unformed, we are placed in this world; and we can partly comprehend in what reſpects we are properly ſituated. But when we conſider the nature of the human mind, and what further attainments it is capable of; how much our wills may be refined, and how our underſtandings may be enlarged without limit; we ſhall think it not impoſſible, but there may be a variety of ſtates, differing in degrees of happineſs, to which, if we fall not ſhort of the glories reſerved for us, we are to ſucceed, as we advance in knowledge and virtue. From the throne of God proceed fountains of living water, at which all creatures drink, each in the place of their abode, and diſtinguiſhed by their ſeveral claſſes. To us, at our immenſe diſtance and in this vale of miſery, the ſtream that flows is not pure and unmixed; but then we are to travel forward, and draw nearer and nearer to the lofty ſource of happineſs and perfection, by infinite gradations, by endleſs approaches.

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We muſt allow, that a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments is not a matter ſo incredible in it's own nature, but that it may be admitted and believed upon evidence. It is neceſſary we keep in mind, how circumſtances vary with us. At firſt we are void of all character: at laſt we come to acquire one. Men originally reſemble one another and agree ſo far, as to ſtand all alike clear of any accounts. During their progreſs in life, they enter into different engagements; contract debts various in kind, which at laſt accumulate to ſuch a ſum, that it may be proper an account be taken of them. We cannot therefore infer, from the manner in which rewards and puniſhments are now diſtributed, what will be their future mode of regulation. Preſent experience, eſpecially as underſtood by ſome, muſt not be thought to ſhew it; we cannot take our eſtimate from thence. This leaves us at liberty to conclude, on certain grounds, that there remains for us

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in the next life a happineſs or miſery, different both as to law and degree from what we now taſte and know. And which is it of the two we chooſe? God, we may be ſure, can take no pleaſure in inflicting evil upon his creatures. Whether will we then, that he viſit us in anger, and at the ſame time indeed in grief; or come to us with joy and in peace? This reſts with ourſelves, and depends on our preſent behaviour.

SERMON V.

HEBREWS xiii. 8.

The same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.

PART I.

THE grand difficulty with some in admitting a future state of rewards and punishments is, that such a state supposes and implies, as they conceive, an administration much more perfect than that of this life; and is not merely an addition to, but an improvement upon, the present course of the world. For, say they, "greater good produced must still prove a greater degree of goodness; a more impartial distribution of rewards and punishments must proceed from a superiour regard to justice and

equity: and they contend, we have no reaſon to give the divine juſtice and benevolence any particular extent, only ſo far as they are ſeen at preſent to exert themſelves. They lay it down and inculcate it as a rule, that we aſcribe to the Deity no more than the preciſe degree of intelligence diſcoverable in his workmanſhip. So far as the traces of any attributes appear, ſo far may we conclude theſe attributes to exiſt. The ſuppoſition of farther attributes is mere hypotheſis; much more the ſuppoſition, that in diſtant periods of place and time there will be a more magnificent diſplay of theſe attributes, and a ſcheme or order of adminiſtration more ſuitable to ſuch imaginary virtues." We ſhall not here diſpute the maxim of theſe Philoſophers; but, in order to reconcile them to the religious hypotheſis, as they call it, of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments, endeavour to ſhew, that it is ſuch as may be defended conſiſtently with their own tenets.

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The doctrine, that we are here in a ſtate of probation, and ſhall be ſentenced hereafter, according to our behaviour, to a place of happineſs or miſery, is founded, as we have ſeen, on what is to be collected from a view of our circumſtances and diſpoſition; on all that we are able to perceive and judge of the methods and courſe of God's proceedings. Thus we aſcribe no deſigns to the Author of nature, but ſuch as we think are deducible from the law of his works, and particularly that of our own frame and conſtitution. What we ſuppoſe of God the cauſe, is not indeed to "be diſcovered to the full in the effect," but appears with an evidence not to be ſlighted, except by thoſe who affirm, that "he is a ſingle being in the univerſe," ſtands alone by himſelf, and that it is impoſſible for us to comprehend the law of his works; or, to ſpeak in plainer terms, form any judgment of his future intentions towards us, from what he is ſeen to do at preſent.

But this, if taken without any limitation and reſerve, muſt appear an extravagant aſſertion, and ſcepticiſm in the extreme: eſpecially if we reflect, that he is a being, however ſingle he ſtands in the univerſe, to whom we all bear an intimate relation; that he is the God who made us, and on whom alone we are to depend for our happineſs: and who may be thought therefore to have given us our faculties for this very purpoſe, that we may inquire and ſearch into his works; and come to ſome knowledge of his will, at leaſt in points highly intereſting, and where our conduct or welfare is nearly concerned.

We ſeem then authorized to conſider and meditate on his government, ſo far as it relates to us; and even to view it at large in both it's parts, including that which remains behind in expectancy, as well as what we already ſee at preſent. Theſe may be ſaid indeed, in a certain

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ſenſe and in common language, to be more perfect, to afford a more magnificent diſplay of juſtice, the one than the other: yet they agree in conſtituting one plan; in containing a deſign, which in the former of them appears only in it's beginnings, but is brought to a completion in the latter. It is from a like regard to juſtice, that we are firſt to be proved, and then rewarded or puniſhed according to our deſerts.

In weighing the comparative merits of the real government of this life and the ſuppoſed government of the next, we ought to have reſpect in both caſes to our circumſtances, and conſider what it is they require. We are now only in the firſt period of our exiſtence: it ſeems fit and requiſite, that we be put under a courſe of diſcipline, and be made to undergo ſome trial. A perfect adminiſtration of juſtice is foreign to our preſent condition; it may better take place in the next

ſtate. Neither are we to look for a pure, unmixed happineſs here: it is to be the reward of virtue hereafter; and is held out to us as an encouragement under the difficulties we have to contend with. The chief of what we can reaſonably hope for at preſent is, that like terms, ſo far as is conſiſtent with the general good, be impoſed on all; and that they be not in their own nature too difficult. We indeed know not enough of ourſelves to be competent judges of the degree of trial, to which it is proper we ſhould be expoſed. We may reſt however aſſured, that *God does not ſuffer us to be tempted above that we are able:* and we may preſume, with reſpect to thoſe who poſſeſs ſuperiour advantages to others, that of them the more will be required; and that any ſervices we perform, will be *accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.* This may ſuffice in ſome ſort to ſhew the meaſure, in which we might expect the divine juſtice and benevolence to be

diſpenſed for the preſent. Hereafter God may diſtribute rewards and puniſhments both with a more liberal and regular hand: not that they will denote a ſuperiour regard to juſtice and equity, but be ſuch as our future condition may demand, and render more fit and ſeaſonable.

In ſuppoſing another life to follow after this, we may be ſaid to make an addition to the works of nature; however we do not at the ſame time make an addition to the moral attributes of their Author: for while we hold, that we are to be diſpoſed of, according to the changes and alterations produced in us, in different ſtates in ſucceſſion, we conceive only a like propriety to appear in the adjuſting of them to our circumſtances. God is believed to be every where and in all times the ſame: it is man, the object of his meaſures, that in the courſe of an eternity varies. Nay, according to our rude conceptions, it may ſeem a

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matter of greater difficulty, a more arduous exertion of the powers of wiſdom, to place us in a proper ſituation in the firſt, than in any ſubſequent ſtage of our exiſtence.

But we will proceed to conſider, as far as we can collect from a view of our preſent condition, the particular way and degree, in which the moral attributes of the Deity appear to be exerted: in order to ſhew more diſtinctly, that a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments requires only a ſimilar exertion; and is to be maintained, as it were, at a like expenſe of divine benevolence and juſtice.

We have been deſcribed as living under the government of general laws, and in a ſtate of ſociety. And firſt as to general laws: we have before ſeen in what manner we may conceive juſtice to be adminiſtered by their means; and we muſt allow alſo, that the divine goodneſs is communicated

cated to us largely through the ſame channel. It ſhould ſeem indeed, from ſacred hiſtory, as if more favourable and indulgent laws had originally been intended for mankind, than thoſe which are now in force; as if the ſeaſons were to have been more kindly and genial; and the earth was to have yielded it's increaſe, both with more willingneſs and in greater abundance. Nature was deſirous of wearing a benign aſpect, but ſhe was made to frown by the tranſgreſſion of our firſt parents: and ſhe ſtill retains the marks of her diſpleaſure. The ground was curſed for their ſake: and we continue to eat of it by the ſweat of the brow. The chief burden indeed of this labour is thrown, in ſocieties, on certain ranks. Yet it is impoſſible for men, whatever be their rank, to diveſt themſelves of all thought, if they would live with credit or ſatisfaction. We can make no improvement in ourſelves, acquire no virtue, nor arrive at any uſeful and valuable attainment, but by attention

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and diligence. Nay without care, we are apt to break out into all the exceſſes of vice and folly. Our minds, like the ground we tread upon, without cultivation will naturally run wild, ſhoot up and be overgrown with weeds. If then we are to ſuppoſe, this proneneſs to ſin and wickedneſs, this imperfection and degeneracy in our own conſtitution as well as in that of the earth, to follow as an effect of the fall of Adam; here is an evil entailed on his poſterity, in the repairing of which it behooves all to ſuſtain a like part. We may diſcover however in the laws of nature, as they ſubſiſt at preſent, a kindneſs and beneficence; they are not to be complained of for impoſing on us ſome care and labour: for to ſuch beings as we are, this itſelf would be a miſery, to be left without employment.

But whatever may be thought of the laws of nature, as to their being gentle and propitious; we muſt allow at leaſt that

that they are conſtant and regular, which is a matter of importance. The neceſſaries and conveniences of life are ſupplied by means of the various arts men have ſought after and diſcovered. But leſt we ſhould value ourſelves too much upon our ſucceſs, let us recollect what acknowledgments are due to God. He is the giver of thoſe faculties, which enable us to make a ſearch. Our chief merit is that of not ſuffering our talents to lie idle. And when we come to exert them, he may be ſaid to cooperate with us in our endeavours, by maintaining a conſtant uniformity in the courſe of nature. For without this proviſion, the efforts we uſe, would either be diſappointed of their aim, or attended with no laſting advantage. But, as the conſtitution of things is invariable, thoſe rules, which have once been found out, are to be put in practice ever after with the like effect: and thus the pains and ſtudy, employed at any time by others in ſome invention or diſ-

covery that they have made, are not loſt to us, but redound alſo to our good; and we become enriched not only by our own but the accumulated experience of mankind. In ſo ample a manner does God contribute to the bleſſings derived to us, either through our own labour and ingenuity, or that of other men.

We cannot but be ſenſible, in the next place, of the emoluments we receive from living in ſociety; and of theſe too God is to be thought the original Author. He gives men thoſe affections which diſpoſe them to unite and aſſociate together; ſo that it may be doubted, whether a ſtate of nature has at any time exiſted, where numbers, abiding in the ſame country, have choſen to live ſeparate and diſtinct from one another, without forming into aſſemblies. God has prepared thoſe bands, which bring and tie us together; only he leaves us free to ſettle the laws of communion ourſelves: he plants in men the

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ſeeds of government; they model the particular form. And they muſt make an unhappy choice if they fix upon one, which ſo far fails of it's end, as not to have the advantage over a ſtate of ſolitude. Yet ſome viſionary men make it a queſtion, whether the evils of ſociety do not more than balance the good; and whether on the whole civil inſtitutions are beneficial? As to juſtice indeed, they will grant, it is only to be met with in ſocieties, of which it is ſo entire and abſolute a creature, that it cannot exiſt out of them, nor have place in a ſtate of nature, where there is no property. Yet ſurely there, men muſt be thought to have at leaſt a property in their lives; but they cannot be ſo ſecure in the poſſeſſion, when there are no poſitive laws to reſtrain violence. Neither can it be denied, where men conſpire, as in government, in directing their endeavours to the ſame point, that the advantages which ariſe will greatly exceed ſuch, as

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can poſſibly fall to the ſhare of the ſame number of men living in a ſtate of nature, unconnected and detached from one another, without any intercourſe, or combination of their ſeveral powers in purſuit of a common end. And as the ſum total of happineſs will here be greater; ſo it is diſtributed, by the help of habit and cuſtom, among individuals, though differing in their outward circumſtances, in ſome ſort in equal and juſt portions. God indeed has made a ſtill further proviſion. He has indued us with a fellow-feeling; that we may be ready at all times to interpoſe in the behalf of one another, and to relieve and comfort thoſe who are in neceſſity and diſtreſs.

Thus we may trace in civil inſtitutions, as well as in the laws of nature, certain outlines of divine benevolence and juſtice. They who bear rule in ſociety, are *the powers ordained of God*; are miniſters appointed by him to execute judgment: the

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rich are his ſtewards, who are to ſupply out of their ſuperfluity the deficiency of others. He conſtitutes both his repreſentatives on the earth, through whoſe hands he diſpenſes his bleſſings: and to him they muſt at one time render an account of the diſcharge of their truſt.

After this view of the ways, by which the divine juſtice and benevolence are conveyed to us, we come next to conſider the particular degree. And here it is fit we proceed, in our calculation, not on what we find to happen in fact, but on what we conceive might poſſibly be the caſe, were men only wiſe or good enough to improve the advantages put into their power. We ſee how God has prepared for us the way of happineſs. Nature, by his appointment, is ready to requite any labour we beſtow upon her; and to anſwer our wiſhes, on a proper application. We ſay indeed, that a change has been made in her diſpoſition for the worſe; and that

ſhe is not ſo liberal and beneficent as at the firſt: and yet, ſuch is our inconſiſtency, we take not care to manage well her gifts, even while we complain of her want of generoſity. Some are laviſh in the uſe of them, and conſume too much upon themſelves; ſome trample them under foot, and make a waſte by plunder and rapine; ſome hoard them up and withhold them from public uſe; and thus a ſcarcity is apt to be brought on in the midſt of plenty. How might ſociety be made to flouriſh, would but the members of it conform to the will of the original Founder, by doing their duty in that ſtation to which he calls them? In what a manſion too has God placed us? encompaſſed around with a magnificence and glory, that makes it ſeem too great and ſuperb for ſo inconſiderable an inhabitant. He has been profuſely kind and indulgent in providing for us. He invites us to conſult our own and each other's welfare. It is man who is his

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own enemy. We envy ourſelves the bliſs, of which we are put into poſſeſſion. If ſo little comfort is to be met with in the world, the fault is our's. It is through our folly and perverſeneſs, that Juſtice dwells not in the land, and that the earth is not *full of the goodneſs of the Lord.*

It remains, that we apply what has been ſaid of our preſent to our future condition; and, from the eſtimate we have taken of this life, form our opinion of that which is to follow.

SERMON V.

HEBREWS xiii. 8.

The ſame yeſterday, and to day, and for ever.

PART II.

WE will now look forward to the next world: and leſt we ſhould be thought to take it for granted, that the attributes of divine benevolence and juſtice will there be exerted in ſome different or ſuperiour manner, we will ſuppoſe our preſent and future condition to agree in their main, conſtituent parts; and the rather, as there ſeems to be ſome authority for it in Scripture. Thus we are taught to believe, that good men will live hereafter in communion and fellowſhip one with another: and we may ſup-

poſe, that we ſhall be governed by general laws; which, according as they are eaſy or rigorous, are but another name for rewards and puniſhments.

But then, as we conſider the future adminiſtration of affairs to be a copy of the preſent, we muſt imagine thoſe only to be put under the government of the ſame laws, who are found, at the time they are diſpoſed of in another ſtate, to bear ſome reſemblance of character. For we, who ſubſiſt together in this world, were at the firſt entirely upon a level; though afterward we come to vary much from one another. It is neceſſary, in order to preſerve the ſame rule of œconomy, that all who are adjudged to one ſtate, be ſuch as are equal, or at leaſt in ſome degree alike. It is agreed to allow every where to the moral attributes of the Deity a ſimilar exertion in manner and degree: but if they, in whom there is a wide difference of character and a great diſparity of merit,

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were to be admitted into one and the ſame place, the entrance into the next life would not be guarded by the juſtice, which is ſtationed here. This leads us to expect, agreeably to what we find declared in Scripture, that finally there will be a ſeparation among men, between the virtuous and vicious, the clean and unclean; and that the gates, at which the righteous are made to enter, will be ſhut upon the wicked.

We will now make a ſuppoſition the leaſt favourable, ſuch as may ſeem even repugnant and diſguſtful to enlightened reaſon, that the future habitation allotted to good men will not be different from this, like laws of nature reigning in both; and that they will be ſubject alſo to pain and ſickneſs, to the like accidents and misfortunes as before. Yet ſtill there will be a great improvement in their condition, merely from their living in a ſociety, where all the members ſo far reſemble one another, as to be in a certain

degree virtuous. There will prevail among them a more general harmony; a cloſer union of wills and affections. They will be able to avail themſelves in a larger meaſure of thoſe natural benefits, which the bounty of God lays before them; and which at preſent we ſo often intercept and deprive ourſelves of, through our folly and wickedneſs. The advantages they procure will be greater than before; the evils they ſuffer much fewer. They will be more free from the miſchiefs of malice, fraud and injuſtice, lawleſs tyranny and ambition; ſee leſs of thoſe diſorders, which deform this life, and make in it ſo wild a waſte. It is inconceivable, even on this ſuppoſition, what a change will be made in the face of their affairs.

But indeed we ought not to imagine, that good men will be removed into a like ſtate, and be made ſubject hereafter to the ſame laws as before. For wherever God may think fit, in his benevolence and juſtice, to place men at firſt, before they

they have given any proof of themſelves; he will be diſpoſed, by the ſame benevolence and juſtice, to prepare for ſuch as ſhall have recommended themſelves by their behaviour, a better and more favourable ſituation. This brings us to apply again the words of Scripture: The good ſhall be raiſed to life with *glorified* bodies; ſhall know pain and ſickneſs no more: *new heavens and a new earth* ſhall be created for them, ſuitable to their improved natures; and they ſhall be advanced to the *aſſembly of juſt men made perfect*. There every thing will conſpire to their bliſs: the beams of divine happineſs will be reflected upon them on all ſides. They may be ſaid to walk in the *light of God's countenance*; to ſtand before the throne of that ineffable being, in whoſe *preſence is the fulneſs of joy*.

But as we are delineating things future after the pattern of things preſent, we ought perhaps rather to ſuppoſe, that the improvements made in good men will be

be gradual; that they will arrive at the ſummit of perfection by ſteps, and not paſs immediately out of a ſtate of frail mortality into one of abſolute happineſs. For beſides that ſuch a tranſition may ſeem abrupt, it may not be thought altogether agreeable to the preſent courſe of nature, where we find advances are made ſlowly. We may imagine then, if it is to be allowed that the reſources of the mind are inexhauſtible, and that it's faculties are capable of augmentation without limit, a number of ſtates to follow one another, each provided with a ſyſtem of general laws correſponding to the ſeveral changes that are made in us, and to which we are to ſucceed in order, as our natures continue to improve. It is eaſy to conceive, how the condition of good men, according to this ſuppoſition, perpetually grows better, as they advance in knowledge and virtue; and how they draw nearer and nearer to the throne of perfection by endleſs approaches.

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This we ſuppoſe to be the rule of ſucceſſion in thoſe ſtates, that none be appointed heirs of one and the ſame ſtate, and placed under the government of like laws, but ſuch as agree within certain limits of moral reſemblance. Yet it is poſſible, that they who are ſimilar and nearly equal may afterward, by taking to different courſes, make different improvements, ſo that their characters will come to deviate from the original proportion; and by this means thoſe general laws, which we imagine always to be adapted to us in the particular condition in which we enter any ſtate, cannot retain throughout the juſtneſs and propriety they had at firſt. Thus we may ſuppoſe diſorders every where to ariſe, much in the ſame way as at preſent: but we can conceive how they are perpetually rectified, how juſtice reſtores herſelf upon every new tranſlation; and how each ſucceeding ſtate corrects the errours of that which goes before. In all this, the moral attributes of the Deity are not extended and amplified

amplified beyond their preſent bounds: his natural attributes indeed are taken for granted, that he has a power ſufficient for theſe things; but his benevolence and juſtice obſerve all along a like form, and go on in the ſame courſe and tenour.

Thus a future ſtate, where the good may look for a ſuperiour happineſs, ſeems deducible from the preſent, by obſerving what is to be thought the juſt and true law of experience. We complain of our earthly tabernacle, as a frail, imperfect building; and yet there ariſes out of it another edifice, which, though far ſurpaſſing in weight of glory, is conſtructed upon the ſame rules, formed after the ſame model.

It might alſo be made to appear, in a ſimilar manner, that hereafter there awaits the wicked a worſe ſituation than the preſent. But we have already perſiſted too long in what may ſeem a train of folly and extravagance at leaſt, if not pre-

preſumption, into which we have been betrayed, in order to accommodate ourſelves to thoſe, who make experience the rule of life, and the ſtandard by which we are to regulate our expectations.

Admitting then the poſition, "that we can give the moral attributes of the Deity no particular extent, only ſo far as they are already ſeen to exert themſelves;" this will not affect the religious hypotheſis. It is ſufficient for a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments, that the divine juſtice and benevolence operate hereafter in the ſame manner and degree as we conceive they do at preſent. Yet after all there may be reaſon to believe, that theſe attributes are exerted by ways and in a degree further than we ſee and comprehend; and exceed what is to be collected concerning them, from our narrow, imperfect views: ſo that the maxim, we have hitherto allowed, and which ſome take ſo much pains to eſtabliſh, may on ſufficient grounds be rejected. God may

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be abſolutely in himſelf at all times the ſame, and yet appear very different to us, in the ſeveral periods of our exiſtence, according as our underſtandings and experience improve and become enlarged. His attributes may be immenſe, ſuch as fill and occupy the mind, in proportion to it's meaſure and capacity; the object may be boundleſs, to be ſeen only by parts, greater or leſs, according as the eye that contemplates is more or leſs perfect.

It is no doubt a rational and proper employment, to examine, as well as we are able, the government of the univerſe, how far we can diſcover a juſtice and benevolence in the adminiſtration of it: yet when we conſider it's form and nature, that it is in all reſpects of an unlimited deſign, includes, as it were, in it's circumference every part both of ſpace and time; when we reflect on the wonderful wiſdom and power by which it is contrived and ſupported, as alſo on the relation we ſtand in to the great Gover-

Governour himſelf; we muſt be diſpoſed to think ſo favourably of it as to believe, it involves a ſcheme of benevolence and juſtice more ample and perfect than we are able to diſcover and trace.

Thus we allow a man, in his religious inquiries, the free uſe and exerciſe of his reaſon: only he muſt not preſume too much upon it, and conſider it as the ſtandard, by which he is to meaſure the "preciſe degree of divine benevolence and juſtice." Let him read the volume of nature, even with the eye of a Critic: yet of an ingenuous Critic; one who is ſenſible, that it is a book on which he cannot comment ſo learnedly, as to beſtow on each paſſage it's due proportion of praiſe or cenſure, and make every where, as he goes along, an accurate diſtribution of critical juſtice. Having done then his utmoſt to give what he thinks a faithful explanation, let him be mindful to add this as an appendix to his other obſervations, that the works of his Author muſt be ſuppoſed to contain number-

numberleſs beauties, which he has not the knowledge and abilities diſtinctly to point out. We allow a virtuous man to be a practical Philoſopher, to attend cloſely to the "experienced train of events:" but let him not reſt his faith ſolely on what he takes to be their courſe; confine his expectations and hopes ſtrictly to the limits of probability as marked out by himſelf. There are hidden treaſures in the depth of the riches of divine wiſdom and power; ſo that things, we may believe, *will work together for good to them that love God*, in a way and degree beyond what we can poſſibly foreſee or conceive. *Now unto him who is able*, and we may add, willing *to do exceeding abundantly above all that we aſk or think, unto him be glory in the Church throughout all ages.*

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